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To Father

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To Father

– Michael Galati

Father, when you died you were too quick
for them at the hospital. They had the oxygen
and things, even in those slow-moving days,
the Depression lingering over all of life,
including yours. Oh, you made plans,
plans to open a factory and some stores,
plans to buy a house somewhere with a yard
for the dog, if only the money would come.
But you were quicker than the money that never
caught up with us, and quicker than hospital
tubes and wires, quicker in dying that is.
So quick were you that when they brought you in,
you were already blue, already cold, and your
wallet had only a few bills, not enough. Not
nearly enough.

The call came in the morning, and Aunt Martha
was to be the strength we would need for the news
about how quick you were, a mere 34 years old,
to duck out of life like that, as if someone
had thrown a baseball right at you, and you went
down to death because that baseball was coming,
and maybe you knew it was coming, so you ducked
into death the way people duck into doorways
when the rain starts to fall.

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Sister didn't believe about your dying.
It was a joke, she said, a very bad joke.
The man who held the world together for us
could not ever be dead for us too. But the phone
kept ringing, and Aunt Martha was there, and Mom
besides herself, so she knew. Denial only goes
up to the corner with you and then it makes you
cross the street by yourself, all alone, cars
whizzing by all the time, and Denial, just standing,
but not ever stepping off into the street with you.
So she knew. She could tell. You had ducked away
from a fast ball aimed right at your head, and when
you stayed down, there were no pinch runners
and never could be, so the Umpire of Sorts
called the game, and all the watchers went home
because it was starting to rain anyway,
and the benches would be wet, and you just lay there
until they started to lower you into the cemetery clay.
Then your mother, who afterwards shook her fist
at the ceiling and blamed God, fell across your casket
in the midst of her wails. Other mourners held her
back from your grave descent. Perhaps you saw.
You were only thirty-four. You were so quick.